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ABSTRACT

The role and function of the school counselor in the school instructional process has been infrequently examined in the recent "school reform" movement. Many of a counselor's duties may center around recordkeeping and evaluation activities. Changes in the instructional and curriculum functions of the school guidance counselor are needed. Planners of the school instructional program must involve the counselor in assessment, diagnosis, and recommendation tasks that assist teachers in working with parents on learning activity plans to ensure students' engagement in the learning process in both school and non-school settings. An effective school reform program must establish policies that encourage use of the guidance counselor as an instructional resource for teachers, parents, and students. This can be done in at least three ways: (1) counselors must become more involved in intervention-based guidance and counseling activities from the earliest school stages; (2) school districts must take steps to establish a major and broad role for the guidance counselors which makes them monitors of student progress and coordinators of a comprehensive and systematic guidance plan for students; and (3) districts must invest money in training and preparing guidance counselors and other resource people to take a more central role in the school instuctional program. (Author/NB)

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GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING IN URBAN SCHOOLS: REFORM ISSUES FOR POLICY MAKERS AND PROGRAM PLANNERS

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ABSTRACT

The role and function of the school counselor in the school instructional process has been infrequently examined in the recent "school reform" movement. Much of a counselor's duties may center around record-keeping and evaluation activities. This article discusses ideas and issues that pertain to potential changes in the "instructional" and "curriculum" functions of the school guidance counselor. It is argued that planners of the school instructional program must involve the counselor in assessment, diagnosis, and recommendation tasks that assist teachers who make efforts to work with parents on "learning activity plans" that ensure students' engagement in the learning process in school and in non-school settings.

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING IN URBAN SCHOOLS:
REFORM ISSUES FOR POLICY MAKERS AND PROGRAM PLANNERS

Introduction

The school reform movement that has emerged over the past several years got a big boost from the publication of the 1983 federally-sponsored report, "A Nation at Risk." It was a refreshing effort that highlighted the extent of American illiteracy and social decline brought on by problems in our school structures. For a change, we read about the critical role of the education system itself in shaping the patterns of academic, personal, and social development among our youths at the primary, intermediate/middle school, junior high and high school levels. Discussions and programs that have emerged to address the question of how to achieve excellence in all our schools through judicious "educational reform" (productive changes in school organization, policies, and practices) have variously focused attention (a) on the principal's role as instructional leader, (b) teachers as central determiners of children's learning, and (c) parents as supporters of their children's intellectual growth among others.

Guidance and counseling issues have not, in my opinion, received sufficient attention in this reform effort. We know intuitively and scientifically that any successful effort to motivate groups of students toward excellence requires the collaborative involvement and support of teachers, parents, and

"other significant persons" such as mentors. As a key "other significant person" the guidance counselor at the local school site presumably is in a good position to contribute a lot to children's growth and development by virtue of their expressed two-fold responsibility to (1) help students achieve an independent and autonomous way of feeling and acting and (2) at the same time help students overcome the specific and immediate needs that are negatively affecting their academic growth. By definition, the guide and counselor is an advocate for the students' needs. However, questions remain as to what are the proper advocacy tasks for school personnel who perform guidance functions and personal counseling functions within school programs (especially programs that serve our Black, ethnic minority, and poor youngsters). All too often we think of the guidance counselor as this person who spends most of his or her time performing a variety of administrative tasks (such as testing, class scheduling, tracking school absences, providing informational brochures and P.R. materials) or counseling a few students with serious problems.

This paper will briefly discuss three questions that are in urgent need of clarification with regard to how the school counselor (or psychologist or social worker) can effectively help establish "excellence" in a school instructional program - excellence as measured by student growth in academic, social, and personal talents. First, we will look generally at how best school guidance counselors can be utilized in our schools. Then we will discuss things the guidance counselor can do to complement

the school's instructional goals and impact students' achievement. Then we will conclude by briefly discussing some of the work role problems experienced by school guidance counselors. My comments here are based on reviewing literature on the subject, talking with educators, and working with school programs as a consultant. I consider my remarks to be preliminary and subject to verification. I invite you to use them as a take-off point for discussion.

Changing Roles For Guidance Counselors in School Reform Efforts

Research has not yet provided much information about which counselor-initiated programs and activities will have the highest yield in terms of most effectively supporting students, parents, and teachers in the instructional process. However, it seems reasonable that more research would tell us conclusively that the most effective roles for guidance counselors who work with Black youngsters will be determined by the normative needs of the students,e.g. the need to have loving and warm and wholesome relationships with parents and guardians, kin and friends, peers and teachers, and the need to do well in school and extend the amount and range of their literacy skills to a level that eventually leads to success in the labor market. (So much academic underachievement among Black youths is due to (a) youngsters' unemployment or underemployment in the processes of reading, writing, computing, social etiquette practices, and (b) their overinvolvement in school skipping, non-attentiveness to lessons, and discipline problems leading to suspension and expulsion.)

Also, the guidance counselor must be available to conduct activities that focus on the non-normative needs of students, as in the case of Black youngsters who are undergoing great stress due to concerns about physical or emotional abuse, neglect, sexuality, sexism, transmitted disease and abuse, drug and alcohol, food abuse, teen pregnancy, teen suicide tendencies, loss of a signficant person, divorce or family separation, violence-prone peer interaction/ gangs; juvenile crime and delinquency, racism, auto accidents, nuclear disasters, dissatisfaction with one's face or body, physical health or speech patterns, poor health upkeep habits, or lack of material resources or other issues. A guidance counselor's work tasks logically should be shaped by the nature and extent of the academic and social needs (and strengths) of the group of students attending a given school. (Yet, interestingly, an October 29, 1986 article in Education Week reported that a special commission of the College Board recently released a report, "Keeping the Options Open", on precollege guidance and counseling which concludes "there is an immense disparity between what counselors are doing and what the needs of kids are". This report also indicated that students who need help most generally receive the least.)

After assessing the youngster's life situation and deciding what specific "limiting" factors are putting the kids "at risk" of intellectual and academic passivity and failure (whether a poverty of parent support, a poverty of language skills, a poverty of wholesome peer associations, a poverty of achievement-oriented attitudes, a poverty of exposure to quality learning activities at

home or in the classroom, a poverty of access to learning materials, or some other "lack"), the guidance counselor should target his or her program efforts toward resolving the problems experienced by the largest numbers of students. Remembering that any guidance counseling situation itself is a learning situation, the effective guidance counselor endeavors to extend children's learning time by providing quality group experiences for students. Parents and teachers are provided with pertinent programs as well since these are the primary actors who shape the development of children's talent.

Once a guidance counselor has determined what are the range of academic and social needs of the Black students at the school and what major personal and environmental factors impede the youngsters' active and regular involvement in learning activities, then he or she should work with the teaching staff to design programs and activities that aim to help guide the youngsters away from the problems that put them at-risk of failure and into a situation that enables the youngsters to participate more actively in learning events in the classroom and in out-of-school settings. These programs should start with an early-intervention component and should recognize developmental-life stage differences in the strengths and needs of youngsters. In other words, the effective guidance counselor must be prepared to take on a variety of responsibilities on the basis of what specific activities and programs will need to be developed for cohorts of Black students (N=10 to 1000) in that particular community to neutralize the "risks" that impede the youngsters from fully developing their

God-given abilities. This may mean variously being a preceptor, psychologist, anthropologist, sociologist, teacher, parent and guidance counselor.

Guidance counselors who work effectively with at-risk youth will typically be able to display an explicit sequence of activities (a guidance curriculum) for the students, their parents, and teachers at the school site. Certainly, they will provide the expected academic assessment services, college and career planning opportunities, tutorial programs and personal counseling encounters that students need. They also will have designed a coherent range of constructive group activities aimed at the social needs of students. Such activities include (1) personal growth seminars that deal with issues pertaining to self respect, integrity, values, goal setting, making choices, scheduling time productively, the importance of pursuing knowledge, and wholesome lifestyle strategies for attaining occupational and personal goals, and (2) sessions where the youngsters (and teachers and parents) can learn "natural" strategies for feeling hurt, pain, anger and dealing with them in a positive way when they are trying to cope with specific anticipated stressful life situations, e.g. test-taking situations, nuclear safety, family separation, bias in the workplace, wrongful termination, etc. These sessions would show the youngsters ways to handle serious problems and develop control skills that are alternatives to escaping through drugs and similar forms of self-medication. Controlled or deep breathing exercises, self-talk, story telling and role playing to relax, writing

therapy, music therapy, identifying human support sources and real-life problems analysis are examples of such strategies. During these experiences, the emphasis will be on "guiding" each youngster into clearer, rational, hopeful perspectives and developmental patterns through exposure to new "life skills" knowledge and learning experiences in groups.

Also, effective guidance counselors will design and implement a series of parent sessions that clarify the specific tasks of support that must be fulfilled by the parents or guardians if the child is to succeed;(e.g. As several mothers of Black underachievers put it, "I thought that was the teachers' job" or "I didn't know I was supposed to do all that").

How the Guidance Counselor Can Contribute to the School's Instructional Program

Perhaps the most significant tasks that the guidance counselor can perform are to provide experiences for youngsters that directly or indirectly extend the time the youngsters are productively employed in the learning process. David Seeley (January, 1987 Education Digest) has noted that when youngsters are unemployed or underemployed in the learning process during the primary and secondary school years, it leads to a sense of dependence and passivity (a lack of the "yearn to learn" quality) that carries over into adult life. These dispositions can even contribute to unemployment in the processes of learning that occur in the workplace and in one's family of procreation. Guidance counselors must be involved in helping to prepare kids to do well

academically by working with teachers (especially teachers of civics, literature, history) to organize classroom-based programs and strategies that show kids how to plan and comfortably carry out a lifestyle (a schedule of activities) that fully involves the kids in the process of learning basic linguistic and cultural knowledge. Importantly, a curriculum development committee that includes the guidance counselors, teachers, staff and coaches of drama, sports, special talents, etc. should plan activities that use some of the teacher's class time for the activities. Such classroom-based activities allow the guidance counselor and other school staff to be involved <u>with</u> the students during certain "guidance-oriented" programs.

Students who are "at-risk" need guidance counselors to provide quality experiences such as workshops on "how to prepare for and take tests," "how to study," "how to manage" problem classroom situations, etiquettes for handling "anti-intellectual peer pressure", and "how to" establish a balanced activity schedule for learning, . Also, the guidance counselor should be an advocate for supplementary tutoring sessions in neighborhood homework houses, adult-child discussion sessions with adults on key topical issues and discussion sessions around specific articles, books, films and plays that help the youngster learn communication strategies and etiquettes for environmental mastery.

Also, the guidance counselor should work with district staff development people and key teachers to provide seminars for the teaching staff that focus on (1) assessing whether teachers' communication strategies with parents and their youngsters are

providing enough incentives and support for home-based teaching and learning or are not doing it, (2) explaining how teachers can restructure their approach to parents so that parents are motivated to support and collaborate in the co-management of the kids learning experiences; (3) identifying strategies for providing youngsters with more classroom opportunities to engage in creative writing, drama, and debate activities that teach moral/ethical lessons; and (4) discussing the benefits and perils of using "stereotypes" and "clinical types" to characterize kids who are underachieving. These discussions would help teachers see why focusing on "cultural differences" in learning style and/or "background " differences (e.g. gender, race, class, "ability" vs. effort, lifestyle), makes it impossible to understand the strengths and needs of the individual youngster as an individual, because this focus buries the individual behind generalizations about a group. For example, on the use of "family background" as a predictor of children's strengths and needs, Leacock (1986) warns:

> It is one thing to say that in a poor community one would expect to find more bitter, angry and withdrawn children, and greater difficulty mastering school lessons because of the tremendous objective difficulties with which many are coping. It is quite another to say that children from poor families generally are uninterested in learning - an inference that unfortunately can so easily become a convenient rationale to excuse inadequate teaching and unequal school facilities in low income areas.

So, issues of stereotyping, teacher expectations and their effects on children's learning are critical issues for guidance counselors to help teachers understand.

During in-service workshops, the guidance counselor should provide information to teachers about the out-of-school lifestyles of the "normal" achieving kid in the school to offset some of the stereotyping that may be prevelent. These sessions should show teachers how to "certify" kids positively and label kids positively, e.g. our kids are serious about learning, personable, well rounded with leadership potential. Variations in parenting strategies could also be discussed, e.g. parents who raise their daughters and love their sons. Also, teachers can benefit from counselors' efforts to introduce more varied, multicultural materials into classroom libraries and point out the importance of picture displays of various cultural groups. Counselors should plan in-service seminars on why poor and Black students do less well on standardized tests and what to do about it, and seminars on strategies for rewarding and motivating the students to put forth more effort to learn. By providing these kinds of experiential opportunities for teachers, the guidance counselor is resourcefully helping teachers to extend the youngsters' learning opportunities.

This expanded "activist" role is a far cry from the "bump on the log" laissez-faire sit-back-and-listen, fill-out-the-forms role we frequently envision when someone mentions "counselor." This type is a "counselor" in name only. The productive counselor functions as an agent of positive growth and change by organizing

projects that will mentor the many, not just a few. Black students and the poor are hurt most by school programs that continue with "business as usual" in this area. Underachievers have not benefitted much from the traditional ways. Their schools especially have got to try new things. The old ways do not work. Most of these kids are dropping out and are not learning enough even when they do not drop out. They need help from active guidance counselors (and teachers) who (1) engage in a systematic process of talent assessment, needs determination and program planning, (2) work to create activities that support the goals of curricular and instructional improvement, and (3) have developed a comprehensive plan to involve teachers and parents and community groups as collaborators in the schooling process.

The "Balancing" Dilemma of the Effective Guidance Counselor

The effective guidance counselor holds a signficant position among the school staff. In some ways, he or she is the "spark plug" to quality teaching and learning (in concert with the administrative leader(s). There is no one strategy for "placing" counselors in the schools. The socio-political situation in the district itself must be weighed when deciding whether to assign one guidance counselor to each school, or to assign one guidance counselor to perform specific tasks at several schools, or to exercise some other arrangement. Even after a district establishes a pedagogically-driven placement strategy, counselors may be placed in schools with a variety of school-based barriers

to their effectiveness at helping most students cultivate "fate control" sensibilities.

In the absence of clear and consistent support from administrators and teachers, the job of the guidance counselor can become difficult, if not impossible, to carry out. Counselors who do not get the support and "protection" of their administrators and teachers may fall victim to staff resentment, conflicting or unclear staff expectations, jaded colleagues who do not want to collaborate or cooperate, and inadequate amounts of resources to get the job done effectively, e.g. time, facilities, materials, consultant services, adult volunteers, student assistants and so forth.

Summary and Recommendations

In summary, an effective school reform program must establish policies that encourage utilization of the guidance counselor as an instructional resource for teachers, parents, and students. This can be done in at least three ways. First of all, counselors must become more involved in intervention-based guidance and counseling activities from the earliest school stages -- before the child is too severely damaged. School districts need to develop comprehensive programs of guidance and counseling for children in the early, middle, and later years of schooling. Guidance counselors are not an expendable resource. When administrators start cutting line items, don't cut out the counselor -- you may be cutting off your nose to spite your face. Teachers can cope a lot better as instructors if they have the

assistance of effective guidance counselors. Second, school districts need to take steps to establish a major and broad role for the guidance counselors in the schools -- a role that makes them one of the "monitors" of student progress and growth, and makes them the coordinators of a comprehensive and systematic guidance plan for the students at the school site. Thirdly, districts will need to invest some dollars in training and preparing guidance counselors and other resource people to take a more central role in the school instructional program.

Our hundreds of Black communities and our millions of Black youths will stay "at risk", as will our nation, if we recoil from the challenge of trying some things differently in our schools. Central to this challenge is the question of whether and how we will employ guidance counselors as resourceful supporters of students' personal development and academic achievement. The services these professionals could provide can surely contribute to a significant increase in the rate at which Black and poor youngsters are constructively employed in the process of learning.

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